The Big Five Personality Traits and Maternal Gatekeeping at the Transition to Parenthood

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Abstract

The transition to parenthood is an important time at which father-child relationships are established. One understudied contributor to the development of these relationships is maternal gatekeeping, which occurs when a mother discourages or encourages father involvement in childrearing. Research has shown that this type of behavior may affect the father's involvement. Knowing factors that contribute to maternal gatekeeping is important so parents can be aware of who is at risk and change their behavior if desired. The purpose of this study was to examine associations between maternal personality and maternal gatekeeping. The personality characteristics examined were the "Big Five": Neuroticism, Agreeableness, Openness, Extraversion, and Conscientiousness. The data used came from a longitudinal study of couples expecting their first child. Surveys administered during the third trimester of pregnancy assessed maternal personality, and surveys administered at 3 months postpartum assessed maternal gatekeeping beliefs and behaviors. Results were based on available data from 118 mothers. Significant correlations indicated that mothers high on Agreeableness had more realistic standards for housework and childcare, were less critical of fathers' parenting, and were less likely to endorse differentiated family roles. Highly extraverted mothers reported greater encouragement of fathers' parenting. In contrast, mothers high on Neuroticism held higher standards for childcare, placed greater value on their maternal identity, and showed more criticism towards their partners. Highly conscientious mothers desired more control over parental decision making. These results suggest that families in which mothers have particular personalities – especially characterized by Neuroticism - may be more at risk for discouraging gatekeeping patterns, and thus lower levels of father involvement in childrearing.

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Four pivotal social trends have emerged in recent decades: 1) higher female employment, 2) a higher rate of single mothers, 3) increased father involvement in childrearing, 4) and higher levels of cultural diversity. These changes in society directly affect family structures and roles, and thus affect fathers (Cabrera, Tamis-LeMonda, Bradley, Hofferth, & Lamb, 2000). The more time women spend participating in paid work away from the home, the more the responsibility for childrearing becomes shared among partners (Beitel & Parke, 1998). This increased father involvement in childrearing has shifted typical gender roles that have been ingrained and replicated in society. Because recent social trends have affected the fathering role, researchers have examined it further.

Father Involvement in Childrearing

However, conceptualizing and measuring the role of 'father' has proven to be a difficult task, resulting in various interpretations. In one study, father involvement was operationalized by comparing the amount of time a father spent in the primary caregiver role to that of his partner (Nangle, Kelley, Fals-Stewart, & Levant, 2003). While this measure may be straightforward, simply quantifying the hours a father spends caring for a child may not be the most accurate measure of the father-child relationship, especially relationship quality. By examining behavioral facets of parenting (i.e., warmth, attention, and responsiveness) father-child relationship quality can be more accurately assessed (Grossman, Pollack, & Golding, 1988). Lamb and colleagues (Lamb, Pleck & Levine, 1987) defined three dimensions of fathering: engagement, responsibility and accessibility. Engagement involves the amount of time directly spent with the child (i.e., playing games) and involves giving attention and responsiveness. Responsibility is exhibited through organizing schedules and making sure appointments are made (e.g., doctors'

appointments for the child). Recent revisions on the three dimensions of father involvement focus on a change in the measurement and conceptualization of the responsibility facet of father involvement. Responsibility is more of a mental process that is typically taken on by mothers. Mothers tend to remember more of the necessities (i.e., doctors appointments, immunization timeframes), whereas fathers may be given specific directions by the mother in order to carry out a task (Coltrane, 1996, p.54; as cited in Pleck, 2010). Finally, accessibility, the lowest level of involvement, is the time when fathers are easily available but not actively involved with the child (i.e., child watching television with father in the house).

Attempts to conceptualize and measure father involvement have surfaced due in part to findings indicating that high father involvement may be linked to higher-quality familial relationships. Most research has shown a positive association between increased involvement in childrearing and marital satisfaction. For example, Harris and Morgan (1991) found that marital satisfaction is higher when mothers perceive fathers as more involved with children. Fathers also report higher relationship quality when they are more involved with their children (King, 2003). Greater father involvement may not only strengthen the marital relationship but may also enhance coparenting, depending on the degree to which mothers support or encourage father involvement (Buckley & Schoppe-Sullivan, in press).

Higher father involvement is also associated with positive child outcomes. Research finds that higher parental involvement in the lives of their children promotes cognitive and social development (Pleck & Masciadrelli, 2004). Because the time that fathers spend with children is usually in positive and engaging activities (Bianchi, Milkie, Sayer & Robinson, 2000), fathers can have a positive impact on the development of their children. One study using the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study data focused on 10,000 children beginning at nine months and

followed them through first grade. The study tracked the degree to which father involvement predicts child cognitive development. It was found that four domains of father involvement appear to benefit children: partaking in cognitively stimulating activities, warmth, physical care, and caregiving activities (Bronte-Tinkew, Carrano, Horowitz & Kinukawa, 2008). Other research supports that fathers' interactions with their children benefit children cognitively. Osborn and Morris (1982) found that fathers who had higher levels of involvement in activities such as reading to the child, or taking the child to nursery school, had children with higher verbal IQ and cognitive ability. In another study of 74 low-income fathers, it was found that fathers often participate in complex play with their children, pushing them to take on more challenging tasks and ultimately benefitting social development (Roggman, Boyce, Cook, Christiansen & Jones, 2004). As a result of these positive implications for family relationships and children's development, researchers have become interested in what promotes or inhibits greater father involvement in childrearing.

Why are Some Fathers More Involved than Others?

But, despite the apparent benefits of involved fathering, research reflects that fathers don't spend as much time in housework or childcare as mothers do (Bianchi et al., 2000). Sociological research offers three theories (relative resources, time, and gender) to explain fathers' more limited participation in domestic work. These theories are usually applied to housework, but may also explain why fathers spend less time in childcare. According to relative resources theory, the partner that possesses more resources (i.e., financial or educational) holds the power in the relationship. Traditionally, in the past, women have been economically dependent on their partners and were unable to bargain out of menial tasks such as housework or physical childcare. Therefore, women with fewer resources than their partners are secured in the

domestic sphere (Greenstein, 1996). On the other hand, men typically possess greater resources in most relationships and are able to opt out of the less desirable childcare tasks (i.e., feeding, changing, and bathing). Research reflects that the largest amount of time fathers spend with their children is through more rewarding childcare tasks (i.e., playing, teaching, talking) (Craig, 2006). While this theory may help explain why fathers spend less time in housework and childcare than women, other theories may offer supplemental explanations.

The time availability theory is based on the logic that the partner with more time to do housework and childcare will do more than his/her partner (Coverman, 1985). The theory posits that mothers spend more time in housework and childcare because they often work in paid employment for fewer hours per week than fathers, leaving mothers with more time to do housework. Thus, the partner with more time out of paid labor will have more opportunity to complete household tasks. It was found that even when women make more money and spend more time in paid labor women still spend more time doing housework and childcare (Bianchi et al., 2000) diminishing the time availability theory as the sole reason why fathers are more or less involved at home.

Gender theory proposes that socialization in early childhood determines marital and household roles (Coverman, 1985; South & Spitze, 1994). The theory states that due to the continued salience of traditional gender roles, men are responsible for the financial support of the family whereas women are responsible for the home. The concept of "doing gender" may help explain why even when women have more resources (i.e., a higher paying job) or less time at home they still spend more time performing domestic labor, taking over where the time availability theory comes short. It is believed that men assert their masculinity by not taking part in housework or childcare while women assert their femininity and work out their gender roles

through household responsibilities (West & Zimmerman, 1987). While these theories help explain some reasons why fathers do less at home, there are other theories that offer additional explanations and focus more on father involvement in childrearing (vs. housework).

Doherty and colleagues' model of Responsible Fathering posits a number of factors that may affect father involvement in childrearing: 1) the coparenting relationship, 2) sociodemographic factors, 3) child characteristics, 4) father characteristics, and 5) mother characteristics (Doherty, Kouneski, & Erickson, 1998). The coparenting relationship, or whether parents interact with conflict or mutual support surrounding parenting issues, may encourage or discourage how often fathers interact with their children and what types of interactions fathers have with their children. Sociodemographic factors such as social support or income may affect the amount of time fathers are able to spend with their children. For example, it is possible that lower-income fathers are forced to spend more time working in order to support the family rather than spending time with the child. Research finds that financial or employment issues within families take the largest toll on fathers due to their perceived role as the economic backbone of the family (Thomson, Hanson, & McLanahan, 1994). This responsibility to economically support the family may provide incentives for fathers' to spend more time in paid employment than time at home.

According to Doherty et al. (1998), characteristics of children such as attitude toward the father, behavioral issues, or temperament may also enhance or detract from a positive father-child relationship. A child with a more positive attitude towards the father or fewer behavioral issues may openly welcome a strong father-child bond, whereas a child that is more indifferent towards the father and has behavioral issues may not be as receptive to a positive relationship. Child characteristics may further affect the amount of motivation a father has to engage with a

child and in this way child characteristics may interact with father characteristics to affect father involvement. Father characteristics that may be important predictors of father involvement include: psychological well-being, role identification, skills, and relationship with his own father. These characteristics and others may determine the degree to which a father chooses to become involved in childrearing (Doherty et al., 1998). For example, a father with less knowledge or fewer skills regarding childrearing may withdraw from his child. On the other hand, a father that is motivated to be present in the life of his child because of past life experiences will do so through spending time with his child. Certain experiences parents endure growing up as well as their relationships with their parents may influence the way they parent later in life (Belsky, 1984). Personal characteristics, child characteristics as well as characteristics of other involved family members may play a role in why some fathers are more involved than others.

In particular, research supports that mother characteristics can play a role in father-child interactions as well. According to a study of 244 first-time mothers, it was found that maternal attitudes regarding paternal competence held a central role with respect to father involvement - especially in terms of caregiving activities (i.e., diapering, bathing, and feeding; Beitel & Parke, 1998). Mothers' attitudes or expectations of the father in addition to the amount of support a mother gives can affect the degree to which a father becomes involved (Doherty et al., 1998). For example, mothers who believe strongly in the importance of a father's role and view him as a competent parent may be more welcoming and encouraging of father involvement, whereas mothers who think that father involvement is less critical and that fathers are less competent parents than mothers are likely to discourage father involvement in childcare.

Maternal Gatekeeping

Although sociological and psychological theories describe various reasons why some fathers may or may not become more involved in childrearing, no single theory appears to provide a complete explanation. Even though father involvement is increasing, fathers' level of involvement is not nearly the amount of mothers' (Bianchi et al., 2000). It was found that one third of mothers' time with children occurs when the mother has sole charge, meaning that the father is not present, whereas only 13 percent of fathers' time is sole charge (Craig, 2006).

Because nearly all of fathers' time with children occurs when the mother is present, mothers may influence fathers' interactions with their children. Maternal gatekeeping has been defined as the extent to which mothers discourage or encourage father involvement (Schoppe-Sullivan, Cannon, Brown, & Mangelsdorf, 2008). Observable negative maternal gatekeeping behaviors include: criticism of the father's parenting or monopolizing interactions with the child. Gatekeepers often take on a strong role in the household, doing a larger percentage of housework and childcare tasks. Surprisingly, few studies have attempted to conceptualize and measure these types of gatekeeping beliefs and behaviors that may be affecting the amount of father involvement in childrearing.

Allen and Hawkins, among the first to study gatekeeping, developed the Maternal Gatekeeping Scale (1999). The scale examines mothers' gatekeeping beliefs and behaviors by focusing on three dimensions (Maternal Role Confirmation, Standards and Responsibilities, and Differentiated Family Roles). Maternal Role Confirmation includes beliefs that secure mothers into a gendered maternal role, which they feel is expected of them because they are female. Research finds that mothering and caring for family is one of the main sources of self-esteem for many women (Hawkins & Roberts, 1992). Because being perceived as a "good wife and mother"

can be critical to the mental health of many women, increased father involvement may not be welcomed openly to the extent that mothers feel the need to have their identities as mothers affirmed.

The Standards and Responsibilities dimension measures the degree to which mothers feel a sense of responsibility for the home and take on the primary role of managing the household while allowing fathers to help when necessary (Allen & Hawkins, 1999). Mothers experiencing a strong sense of standards and responsibilities may often redo household or childcare tasks because how other family members completed these tasks did not meet their standards (Allen & Hawkins, 1999). The dimension of Differentiated Family Roles is a gendered view of household responsibilities. Mothers who endorse differentiated family roles may believe that women are supposed to be in charge of domestic labor, and therefore exclude fathers from participation in the female-dominated domestic sphere (Allen & Hawkins, 1999).

In their study of the gatekeeping beliefs and behaviors of 622 married mothers', Allen and Hawkins (1999) found and labeled three types of mothers: 1) Collaborators, 2) Intermediates, and 3) Gatekeepers. Collaborators were mothers that held no gatekeeping beliefs and shared housework and childcare responsibilities with their partners. Intermediates held a few gatekeeping beliefs regarding maternal control of domestic tasks and behaved accordingly by sharing some work with fathers, whereas Gatekeepers scored high on all three dimensions of gatekeeping and spent an average of five hours more work in the home per week than other types of mothers (Allen & Hawkins, 1999). Allen and Hawkins did indeed find that maternal gatekeeping beliefs are often accompanied by gatekeeping behaviors.

Another approach to measuring maternal gatekeeping was developed by Fagan and Barnett through the Maternal Gatekeeping Scale (2003). Their approach focused on determining

the parent that holds primary responsibility for certain childcare tasks, ranging from engaging activities (i.e., feeding the baby) to responsibility related parenting (i.e., setting up doctors' appointments for the child). In their study of 72 mothers on welfare, researchers questioned mothers regarding parental responsibility. They found the results to be consistent with previous research (i.e., Allen & Hawkins, 1999) in that there was a relationship between father involvement and maternal gatekeeping. Their other major finding - that parental competence was related to father involvement - was consistent with previous work by Lamb and colleagues. For example, fathers who are perceived as more competent believe they are good parents and chose to spend more time in the parenting role (1987). While Fagan and Barnett's research supported the existence of maternal gatekeeping, other studies began focusing on different aspects of gatekeeping beliefs and behaviors.

An additional measure of gatekeeping was developed by VanEgeren (2000), and was distinguished by its focus on encouraging as well as critical behaviors of mothers in response to fathers' parenting. Previous research has typically placed a negative connotation on gatekeeping behavior by defining it as mothers' attempts to purposely exclude fathers from involvement in childrearing. Using this questionnaire to measure maternal gatekeeping, Schoppe-Sullivan et al. (2008) showed that maternal encouragement may play an important role in determining the amount of father involvement with their infant children. For example, mothers that exhibited more encouraging beliefs and behaviors regarding father involvement had fathers that were more involved in childcare.

In sum, maternal gatekeeping has drawn attention from researchers in recent years but remains an understudied phenomenon. Not only is there limited literature exploring relations between gatekeeping and father involvement, but there is even less research focused on

uncovering the factors that may make some mothers more prone to gatekeeping beliefs and behaviors than others. There are thought to be various factors that influence the degree of gatekeeping and which type (encouraging or discouraging) mothers exhibit. For example, mothers' perceptions of their partners' parental competence was found to be a factor related to the amount of gatekeeping. When mothers rated fathers as having a higher level of competence, mothers displayed fewer negative beliefs (Fagan & Barnett, 2003). However, it is also possible that a mother's own characteristics may play an important role in the extent to which she encourages or discourages father involvement.

Personality and Maternal Gatekeeping

One set of characteristics that may affect mothers' propensities toward gatekeeping but has received little research attention is personality. Personality is an excellent candidate because large bodies of theory and research implicate personality in couple and parent-child relationship functioning. For example, Belsky (1984) developed a process model of parenting, which pinpointed three sets of factors affecting how a parent functions: parental psychological resources, contextual sources of stress and support, and child characteristics. According to Belsky, the most important set of factors in parental functioning is parents' psychological resources. Similarly, personality characteristics can be considered part of the enduring personal vulnerabilities that individuals bring to couple relationships and affect the functioning of these relationships (Karney & Bradbury, 1995).

Research on personality has utilized various measures, however, The Big Five is considered the most commonly used conceptualization of personality, and characterizes personality as consisting of five dimensions: 1) Agreeableness, 2) Extraversion, 3) Openness, 4) Conscientiousness, and 5) Neuroticism (Costa & McCrae, 1992). Agreeableness reflects the

degree to which an individual is compassionate or cooperative rather than combative with others. An individual high on Agreeableness would exhibit trust, and altruism, and values stable relationships, whereas an individual low on this trait would be distrustful of others and hold antagonistic attitudes. Extraversion assesses how energetic an individual is rather than introverted. An individual high on Extraversion enjoys being around other people and displays excitement and assertive behaviors, whereas an individual low on this trait enjoys alone time and doesn't desire social interaction as much.

Openness to experience describes how inventive or curious an individual is, rather than conservative. An individual high on Openness appreciates new experiences, and is generally more aware of their feelings, whereas an individual low on Openness is more straightforward and tends to hold more traditional beliefs. The trait of Conscientiousness describes the degree to which an individual is organized rather than careless. For example, an individual high on Conscientiousness exhibits a high degree of self-discipline and is driven by achievement, whereas an individual low on this trait would be easy-going and less driven to control basic impulses. Finally, Neuroticism assesses the individual's degree of emotional instability rather than stability. An individual high on Neuroticism frequently experiences negative emotions (fear, anxiety, depression), whereas an individual low on this trait would be more emotionally stable and experience fewer negative emotions.

Previous research has investigated parent personality as it relates to parenting behavior and has found connections between parent personality traits and parenting, consistent with Belsky's model (1984). In a study performed by Belsky and Woodworth (1995), the researchers found connections between parenting and the traits of Agreeableness and Extraversion, such that these traits were associated with more positive parenting. Using data from the 69 couples that

took part in the study, researchers concluded that Extraversion had a major effect on the parenting of fathers whereas Agreeableness had more of an effect on mothers. Researchers believe this is because Extraversion (being active and sociable) describes the types of interactions fathers typically have with their children. As previously stated, fathers usually take part in the fun and engaging tasks with children (Craig, 2006). Results also indicated that the trait of Agreeableness had an effect on mothers' parenting. Researchers believe this is correlated because the traits associated with Agreeableness (compassion, trust) fit more closely with typical mothering attributes (Belsky & Woodworth, 1995).

Another study of personality and parenting focused on 599 families and examined associations between the Big Five and three dimensions of parenting: warmth (vs. rejection), behavioral structure (vs. chaos), and autonomy support (vs. coercion). Adolescents' ratings of their parents' warmth and overreactivity were used in addition to parental reports of competence and personality. Results indicate that parents high on Agreeableness and Extraversion exhibited more warmth towards their children (de Haan, Prinzie, & Deković, 2009). In sum, both the Belsky and Woodworth (1995) and de Haan et al. (2009) studies suggest that Extraversion and Agreeableness are associated with positive parenting practices.

In another study researchers found that highly reactive individuals (those with higher levels of anger or negative emotions), a trait similar to Neuroticism of the Big Five, hold more of a desire for control and have a more difficult time working cooperatively and compromising with their partners (VanEgeren, 2003). Mothers who demonstrate high levels of reactivity or Neuroticism may have difficulty compromising with their partners and resort to negative gatekeeping behaviors in order to keep control of parenting decisions. This behavior may

contribute to coparenting conflict or block fathers' contributions to both housework and childcare.

An additional study examining a similar sample to that of the current study, 97 expectant parents transitioning into parenthood, researchers examined pre-birth parental characteristics (beliefs about parent and gender roles and personality) as predictors of maternal gatekeeping. It was found that progressive beliefs about family and gender roles guarded against the effect of negative emotionality (Cannon, Schoppe-Sullivan, Mangelsdorf, Brown & Sokolowski, 2008) a trait closely linked with Neuroticism. In other words, negative emotionality in one parent was only linked with increased maternal negative control (negative gatekeeping behavior) when the other parent had less progressive beliefs about fathers' roles. Thus, maternal personality does show a relationship with parenting, and may also be a predictor of maternal gatekeeping beliefs and behaviors.

The Present Study

The purpose of this study was to examine the associations between the Big Five Personality Traits and maternal gatekeeping beliefs and behaviors. It was hypothesized that a significant relationship between the Big Five Personality Traits and Maternal Gatekeeping beliefs and behaviors exists. It was expected that the traits of Agreeableness, Extraversion, and Openness would be most highly correlated with encouraging maternal gatekeeping rather than discouraging maternal gatekeeping. Specifically, mothers high on these dimensions were expected to exhibit a high frequency of encouraging behaviors towards fathers (e.g., inviting the father to interact with the child, or more frequently complimenting and encouraging positive father-child interactions). These mothers were also expected to hold less traditional beliefs of differentiated family roles and to be less dependent than other mothers on the role of 'mother' for

their identities. Mothers exhibiting high levels of Agreeableness, Extraversion, and Openness were further expected to not hold excessively high standards or responsibilities in the home, to feel less of a need for controlling the decision making regarding childcare, and to engage in low levels of criticism of fathers' parenting.

In contrast, mothers high on Conscientiousness or Neuroticism were expected to be especially prone to negative or discouraging maternal gatekeeping. It was anticipated that these mothers would be more likely than other mothers to hold stringent standards for the home and childcare and to criticize fathers' parenting. In addition, these mothers were expected to hold more traditional beliefs of differentiated family roles, to feel a greater need to control decision making regarding childcare, and to have more of a dependence on the role of 'mother' for their identities. Not surprisingly, such mothers were hypothesized to also show less encouraging maternal gatekeeping behavior. See Figure 1 for expected outcomes.

Discouragers of father involvement	**Encouragers of father involvement**
• Low Agreeableness • Low Extraversion • Low Openness • High Conscientiousness • High Neuroticism	• High Agreeableness • High Extraversion • High Openness • Low Conscientiousness • Low Neuroticism

Figure 1: Expected Associations between Maternal Personality and Maternal Gatekeeping

Methods

Participants

Participants were 118 expectant mothers involved in a longitudinal study of first-time parents (The New Parents Project). The sample consisted of 92% white and 8% non-white mothers. Eight-seven percent of mothers were married, and 13% were cohabiting with the expectant father. The range of annual income for dual-earner participants ranged from 24,000-238,000 with a median annual income of 81,000. Education level of the sample was on average more education than the general population. Four percent of the sample reported their highest education level as less than college, 19% had some college but less than a bachelor's degree, 41% had a bachelor's degree, and 36% had beyond a bachelor's degree as their highest level of education. The median education level of the sample was a bachelor's degree, which is higher than the general population.

Procedure

Data were derived from two separate time points in The New Parents Project, a study conducted in a large Midwestern city in the United States. In order to meet eligibility requirements for the New Parents Project, respondents had to be: dual-earner couples expecting their first child, over the age of 18 years, able to speak and read English, currently living with their partner, and planning to return to work within six months after the child was born. Recruitment for participants was done though childbirth education classes, newspaper and movie ads, strategically placed flyers and word-of-mouth (i.e., snowball sampling).

At Phase 1 of the study, during the third trimester of pregnancy, participants were asked to complete either online or mailed questionnaires. Participants that chose online questionnaires were assigned separate usernames and passwords to login and complete the questionnaires.

Participants that chose mailed questionnaires received two separate packets requiring them to complete surveys individually and seal them in separate envelopes. Surveys were picked up from participants' homes when research assistants conducted home-based assessments including individual interviews and videotaped interactions. At Phase 2 when participants reached three months post-partum, questionnaires were sent to participants' homes. Once again couples were asked to complete questionnaires individually, seal them in separate envelopes, and the questionnaires were picked up at another scheduled home-based assessment. For the present study, only questionnaires completed by mothers at Phase 1 and Phase 2 were utilized. The maternal gatekeeping measures used at Phase 2 of the study are included in the Appendix.

Measures

Personality. During the third trimester of pregnancy, expectant mothers completed the 60-item *NEO – Five Factor Inventory* (Costa & McCrae, 1992), a commonly used and valid measure of the "Big 5" dimensions of personality (i.e., Neuroticism, Extroversion, Openness, Agreeableness, and Conscientiousness; average scale α = .78). In the current study, α = .88 for Neuroticism, .79 for Extraversion, .72 for Openness, .71 for Agreeableness, and .85 for Conscientiousness.

Maternal Gatekeeping. At three months postpartum, mothers completed the 11-item *Maternal Gatekeeping Measure* developed and validated by Allen and Hawkins (1999). This questionnaire assessed three dimensions of gatekeeping: Maternal Role Confirmation (4 items; e.g., "When my children look well groomed in public, I feel extra proud of them"), Standards and Responsibilities (5 items; e.g., "I have higher standards than my spouse/partner for how well cared for the house should be"), and Differentiated Family Roles (2 items; e.g., "Most women enjoy caring for their homes, and men just don't like that stuff"). In Allen and Hawkins' original

study, Cronbach's alphas were .79 for Maternal Role Confirmation, .77 for Standards and Responsibilities, and .66 for Differentiated Family Roles. In the current study, α = .69 for Maternal Role Confirmation, .81 for Standards and Responsibilities, and .65 for Differentiated Family Roles.

Mothers also completed Fagan and Barnett's (2003) *Maternal Gatekeeping Scale***,** modified for mothers of infants, which taps mothers' preferences for control over child rearing tasks and parental decision making (e.g., "When my baby has to go to the doctor, I think I should be the one to take him/her instead of my baby's father/mother"; 1 = *strongly agree*; 5 = *strongly disagree*). In Fagan and Barnett's study, Cronbach's alpha for this scale was .93. In the present study, α = .92. Finally, mothers' perceptions of maternal gatekeeping behavior were assessed using the *Parental Gatekeeping Inventory* (VanEgeren, 2000), which asked mothers to report on the frequency (1 = *never*; 6 = *several times per day*) with which they respond to the father's parenting behaviors with encouragement (9 items; e.g., "tells you how happy you make your child") or criticism (8 items; e.g., "looks exasperated and rolls her eyes"). In Schoppe-Sullivan et al. (2008), Cronbach's alphas for both the encouragement and criticism scales were reported as .86. In the present study α = .74 for Criticism, and .82 for Encouragement.

Results

Descriptive statistics for the maternal personality and gatekeeping variables were computed and are reported in Table 1. The statistics indicate that all three dimensions of Allen and Hawkins' (1999) Maternal Gatekeeping Scale (Maternal Role Confirmation, Standards and Responsibilities, and Differentiated Family Roles) exhibited means very close to the exact centers of the scales. On average, mothers reported that discouraging gatekeeping beliefs and behaviors were "a little like" themselves. Specifically, the maternal role for these mothers was

only “somewhat important” to their identities. Also, retaining stringent Standards and Responsibilities for housework and childcare was only “somewhat like” them. For Differentiated Family Roles, mothers on average reported to be in between “neutral” and “disagree” with respect to discouraging gatekeeping beliefs towards father involvement (i.e., most women enjoy caring for their homes, and men just don’t enjoy that stuff). In regards to decision making (Fagan & Barnett’s (2003) Maternal Gatekeeping Scale), mothers generally disagreed with discouraging gatekeeping beliefs and behaviors (i.e., If my baby is upset, I think I should be the one to comfort him/her, not my baby’s father). On the Parental Regulation Inventory (VanEgeren, 2000), which assessed frequency of behaviors, mothers reported that they almost never criticized their partner’s parenting and that they were more encouraging of father involvement. In sum, a fairly wide range of maternal gatekeeping beliefs and behaviors were detected within the sample; however, on average mothers appeared to be supportive of father involvement.

There was also a range of responses received from mothers regarding personality. Mothers scored higher than the center of the scale on all traits (Agreeableness, Extraversion, Openness, and Conscientiousness) except Neuroticism in which they scored below the center of the scale. For example, mothers in general were trusting, outgoing, creative, organized and emotionally stable. This finding makes sense with respect to the demographics of the sample, with mothers being highly educated, and of higher socio-economic status.

Pearson Correlations were computed between the Big Five Personality Traits and the dimensions of maternal gatekeeping and results are reported in Table 2. As previously stated in the hypotheses, Agreeableness, Extraversion and Openness were expected to relate to more encouraging gatekeeping beliefs and behaviors and this was partially true of the results. It The Big Five trait Agreeableness exhibited significant inverse relations with the maternal

gatekeeping dimensions of standards and responsibilities, differentiated family roles, and criticism. In other words, mothers who were more agreeable (i.e., cooperative, trusting) had more relaxed standards for housework and childcare, reported less traditional beliefs about family roles, and refrained from criticizing fathers' parenting. There were no significant associations observed between Agreeableness and Maternal Role Confirmation, Decision Making or Encouragement. Extraversion was found to be positively correlated with maternal encouragement. In other words, mothers that were highly extraverted (outgoing, enthusiastic) reported a higher frequency of engaging in behaviors that support fathers' involvement in parenting. An example of this would be asking for the father's opinion, or complimenting his parenting. There were no significant associations observed between Extraversion and Maternal Role Confirmation, Standards and Responsibilities, Differentiated Family Roles, Decision Making, or Criticism. In addition, no significant correlations emerged between Openness and any of the dimensions of maternal gatekeeping beliefs and behaviors.

As previously referred to in the hypotheses of the study, Conscientiousness and Neuroticism were expected to relate to negative gatekeeping beliefs and behaviors and this was apparent in the results. The trait of Conscientiousness was significantly related to Decision Making. In other words, mothers high on this trait (organized, controlled) desired more control with respect to decision making for the child. However, Conscientiousness was not correlated with Maternal Role Confirmation, Standards and Responsibilities, Differentiated Family Roles, Criticism, or Encouragement. Neuroticism was significantly associated with Maternal Role Confirmation and Criticism, and was trending towards significance with Standards and Responsibilities. In other words, highly Neurotic mothers (those with negative emotionality, anxious) rated the role of 'mother' more central to their identities, exhibited more criticism

towards their partners' parenting, and held more stringent standards for housework and childcare. No significant associations were found relating Neuroticism to Differentiated Family Roles, Decision Making, or Encouragement.

Discussion

The purpose of the present study was to determine if the Big Five Personality traits were related to maternal gatekeeping beliefs and behaviors among new mothers across the transition to parenthood. While there have been various studies linking personality to parenting (Belsky, 1984; Belsky et al., 1995; Cannon et al., 2008) there is little research exploring the relationship between personality and maternal gatekeeping. The current study indicates that there are associations between maternal personality and maternal gatekeeping beliefs and behaviors. The results support the literature regarding parenting and personality.

In general, the hypothesis that Agreeableness, Extraversion and Openness would be related to more positive gatekeeping beliefs and behaviors than Conscientiousness and Neuroticism was partially supported by the correlations. Extraversion was directly linked with a higher frequency of encouraging behaviors towards fathers and thus confirmed the hypothesis. Agreeableness, although not related to encouragement, was related to the absence of negative or discouraging beliefs and behaviors such as Standards and Responsibilities, Differentiated Family Roles, and Criticism. Specifically, mothers high on Agreeableness held less stringent standards for housework and childcare, believed less in differentiated family roles, and exhibited less criticism towards their partners. The only personality characteristic expected to relate to encouraging beliefs and behaviors that showed no significant correlations was Openness; however, the lack of connection between Openness and parenting was consistent with previous literature. Only one study has found a connection between parenting and Openness and found

that it relates to generativity and authoritarianism (Peterson, Smirles & Wentworth, 1997); the remaining literature has struggled to find any other connections.

On the other hand, the hypothesis that Conscientiousness and Neuroticism would be correlated with discouraging gatekeeping beliefs and behaviors was also reflected in the results. It had been assumed that there would be a stronger correlation between Conscientiousness and multiple dimensions of gatekeeping; however, Conscientiousness was linked to only one negative dimension, decision making. The finding that Conscientiousness is related to decision making is logical in that Conscientious mothers (organized, driven) would desire more control over parental responsibilities. It was surprising to see that this trait failed to be significantly related to any other dimension of gatekeeping because it is a trait that implies a need for structure and organization, which could carry over into attempts to discourage father involvement. As hypothesized, Neuroticism was related to discouraging beliefs and behaviors regarding father involvement. This trait was linked with higher Maternal Role Confirmation. This could be because highly Neurotic mothers that are prone to negative emotionality (including depression and anxiety), may rely heavily on the role of mother for their self-esteem. As previously stated, for most women, caring for the family is a main source of self-esteem (Hawkins & Roberts, 1992), but for Neurotic women this may be especially true. Also, Neuroticism was trending towards significance with the dimension of Standards in Responsibilities. Thus, highly neurotic mothers held more stringent standards for housework and childcare. In addition, Neuroticism was related to the frequency of criticism mothers exhibited towards their partners, in that highly neurotic mothers were more critical. It is logical that Neuroticism was related to discouraging beliefs and behaviors towards gatekeeping rather than encouraging due to the negative emotionally associated with this trait.

Strengths and Limitations

This particular study had both strengths and limitations. The most important strength of the current study was the examination itself looking at the connection between gatekeeping and personality. Because gatekeeping is a relatively new construct and little research exists on the topic, this study advanced the knowledge of what factors may influence certain gatekeeping beliefs or behaviors. Understanding the predictors of these behaviors may assist families during the transition to parenthood. By knowing which personality traits play a role in mothers' encouragement or discouragement of father involvement, gatekeepers can change their behaviors if desired.

Another strength of the study was the expansion of the gatekeeping construct to include encouragement of father involvement as well as discouragement. Previous literature (Allen & Hawkins, 1999; Fagan & Barnett, 2003) has examined gatekeeping only in terms of negative beliefs and behaviors, excluding the possibility of maternal facilitation of father involvement. By using VanEgeren's Parental Gatekeeping Inventory (2000), reports of mothers' encouragement as well as their criticism were taken into consideration. Few scales focus on these possible positive or encouraging dimensions of gatekeeping, let alone compare them to mothers' individual characteristics.

While this study contained strengths, it also had its limitations. Because the sample size of this particular study was relatively small in scale, it was difficult to establish generalizability. The sample was not representative of the general population in various ways. First, there was little racial diversity among participants with a predominantly white sample. The sample was not representative for education either, with a highly skewed median of education at a bachelor's degree. In addition, the average annual income for the dual-earner families was well above the

average family in the United States. A limitation within the sample could be the lack of variation of educational attainment. It is possible that because the sample was predominantly of higher education and income different results emerged than would be for the general population. Mothers with higher education may have access to better parenting resources than mothers with less education, which may have affected the amount of gatekeeping that occurred. Also it is possible that mothers of higher socio-economic status encountered different experiences regarding parenting while growing up. As previously stated, the way an individual was raised often has an effect on the way they parent in the future (Belsky, 1984). For example, an individual growing up in a low socio-economic environment may have been exposed to less positive parenting practices such as an absent parent, or overbearing work hours for one or both parents. Because this sample was of such high socioeconomic status it is possible that mothers were exposed to more positive experiences than the general population.

As previously stated, research suggests many other variables that may affect father involvement and gatekeeping tendencies, including the quality of coparenting and couple relationship, (Buckley, Schoppe-Sullivan, in press), or maternal attitudes about fathers' competence in parenting (Beitel & Parke, 1998). While research does implicate personality as an important factor of parenting (Belsky, 1984), personality is not the only factor influencing gatekeeping or father involvement. For example, if the quality of the coparenting or marital relationship is suffering, mothers may be more prone to discouraging gatekeeping beliefs and behaviors simply because of the negative feelings fostered between partners. In addition, mothers who perceive their partners as less competent may also exhibit discouraging gatekeeping beliefs and behaviors (Beitel & Parke, 1998). Because of the wide range of possible factors influencing gatekeeping and the lack of research on the topic, it is difficult to state that personality is the

largest predictor of gatekeeping. Because of the various contributors to maternal gatekeeping, future research should be developed.

Future Directions

Due to the limitations of this study, further investigations of the associations between personality and maternal gatekeeping are warranted. The New Parents Project intends to bridge the gap of knowledge in this subject area upon completion of data collection, coding and analysis. Data from the Project not only include surveys completed by parents, but also include videotaped interactions of triadic play between mother, father and child. From these interactions of both play and childcare, observed maternal gatekeeping behaviors can be identified. Obtaining videotaped instances of maternal gatekeeping behaviors can help identify the degree of both encouraging and discouraging behaviors toward father involvement as an alternative to relying on self- reports of gatekeeping. These objectively coded examples of gatekeeping may support the small amount of research providing evidence of maternal gatekeeping, could provide a way to validate the parental reports, and could allow for examination of associations between personality and observed gatekeeping. Another possible direction outside of The New Parents Project could be to gather a more diverse, nationally representative sample and gather both self-reports of gatekeeping as well as videotaped interactions in order to triangulate future results. Also, controlling for more factors that may affect father involvement may help support the case that maternal gatekeeping does indeed affect the degree to which fathers are involved.

Conclusion

Overall, the current study explored a relatively new and understudied behavior and belief system as well as the possible traits that may influence these gatekeeping tendencies. Because few studies have attempted to examine these relations, future research on the topic should be

considered so that maternal gatekeeping can be more clearly understood. Discovering the factors that contribute to this construct can help families cope with discouraging gatekeeping so that fathers can become more involved if desired. Also, being aware of the traits that may influence encouraging maternal gatekeeping can be useful to new parents. While this study was correlational, it provides further support of gatekeeping that previous researchers (Allen &Hawkins, 1999; Fagan & Barnett, 2003; VanEgeren, 2003) have strived to conceptualize and measure. The outstanding benefits that father involvement has exhibited on children's social (Roggman et al., 2004) and cognitive development (Osborn et al., 2004; Pleck et al., 2004) as well as other familial relationships (Harris et al., 1991; Buckley et al., in press) deserves further exploration into factors that affect father involvement. Doherty and colleagues (1998) describe mother characteristics (such as maternal gatekeeping) as important factors effecting father involvement. Uncovering the predictors of encouraging and discouraging gatekeeping beliefs and behaviors may help coparenting relationships and therefore allow for fathers to become more involved in the lives of their children, promoting positive development as well as positive family relationships.

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Table 1:

Descriptive Statistics of Maternal Gatekeeping Beliefs and Behaviors and The Big Five Personality Traits

	Possible Min	Possible Max	Actual Min	Actual Max	Mean	Standard Deviation
Maternal Role Confirmation	1.00	4.00	1.25	4.00	2.64	.68
Standards and Responsibilities	1.00	4.00	1.00	4.00	2.14	.74
Differentiated Family Roles	1.00	5.00	1.00	4.50	2.60	.93
Decision Making	1.00	5.00	1.00	3.78	1.93	.71
Criticism	1.00	6.00	1.00	4.00	2.08	.64
Encouragement	1.00	6.00	1.89	5.67	4.07	.76
Agreeableness	1.00	5.00	2.50	4.92	3.98	.50
Openness	1.00	5.00	2.00	4.58	3.25	.50
Extraversion	1.00	5.00	1.92	4.83	3.60	.51
Conscientiousness	1.00	5.00	1.67	5.00	3.98	.54
Neuroticism	1.00	5.00	1.17	4.58	2.56	.69

Table 2:

Correlations between the Big Five Personality Traits and Maternal Gatekeeping Beliefs and Behaviors

	Maternal Gatekeeping Measures					
Personality	Maternal Role Confirmation	Standards & Responsibilities	Differentiated Family Roles	Decision Making	Criticism	Encouragement
Agreeableness	-.09	-.38**	-.22*	-.10	-.35**	-.02
Extraversion	.07	-.01	.01	-.01	-.00	.25**
Openness	-.14	-.08	-.02	.03	.01	.01
Conscientiousness	.07	.04	.07	.20*	-.06	.08
Neuroticism	.21*	.18+	-.02	-.05	.22*	-.01

+$p < .10$ *$p < .05$, **$p < .01$

Appendix

Maternal Gatekeeping Scale

*The following statements describe feelings many parents have about family roles. Please circle the number that best describes how much each statement describes **your** feelings. If some statements do not apply, use N/A.*

		N/A	Not at all like me	A little like me	Like me	Very much like me
1. S&R	I frequently redo some household tasks that my spouse/partner has not done well.	0	1	2	3	4
2. MRC	If visitors dropped in unexpectedly and my house was a mess, I would be embarrassed.	0	1	2	3	4
3. S&R	I like being in charge when it comes to domestic responsibilities.	0	1	2	3	4
4. S&R	It's too hard to teach family members the skills necessary to do the jobs right, so I'd rather do them myself.	0	1	2	3	4
5. MRC	When my family looks well groomed in public, I feel very proud.	0	1	2	3	4
6. S&R	I have higher standards than my spouse/partner for how well cared for the house should be.	0	1	2	3	4
7. MRC	I care about what my neighbors, extended family, and friends think about the way I perform my household tasks.	0	1	2	3	4
8. S&R	My spouse/partner doesn't really know how to do a lot of household chores…so it's just easier if I do them.	0	1	2	3	4
9. MRC	I know people make judgments about how good a partner/mother I am based on how well cared for my house and family are.	0	1	2	3	4

Please circle the number that best describes your feelings:

		Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
1. DFR	Most women enjoy caring for their homes, and men just don't enjoy that stuff.	1	2	3	4	5
2. DFR	For a lot of reasons, it's harder for men than for women to do housework and child care.	1	2	3	4	5

Note:
MRC=Maternal Role Confirmation
S&R=Standards and Responsibility
DFR=Differentiated Family Roles

Maternal Gatekeeping Scale

*Please circle the number corresponding to your beliefs about **your** role as a parent:*

		Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1.	When my baby needs to be fed, I think that I should be the one to decide what s/he eats, not my baby's father.	1	2	3	4	5
2.	If a choice has to be made about what clothing my baby will wear, I think that I should be the one to make that decision, not my baby's father.	1	2	3	4	5
3.	If someone needs to talk to my baby's day care provider, I should be the one to do it, not my baby's father.	1	2	3	4	5
4.	If my baby is upset, I think I should be the one to comfort him/her, not my baby's father.	1	2	3	4	5
5.	When my baby has to go to the doctor, I think I should be the one to take him/her instead of my baby's father.	1	2	3	4	5
6.	If a decision has to be made about who my baby will play with (or spend time with), I think that I should be the one to make that decision, not my baby's father.	1	2	3	4	5
7.	If a decision has to be made for my baby, I think that I should be the one to make it, not my baby's father.	1	2	3	4	5
8.	I should be the one to decide when my baby needs a bath, not my baby's father.	1	2	3	4	5
9.	If a decision has to be made about whether or not my baby will watch TV or videos, I think that I should be the one to make that decision, not my baby's father.	1	2	3	4	5

Parental Gatekeeping Inventory

*How often do **YOU** do the following things to encourage your baby's father to be involved in child care and with your baby, including feeding, play, and emotional support?*

	How often do YOU:	Never					Several times a day
1.	Tell your baby's father to do a child care task ("Go wash Tyler's face.")	1	2	3	4	5	6
2.	Ask your baby's father politely to help ("Can you wash Tyler's face please?")	1	2	3	4	5	6
3. E	Compliment your baby's father ("You're able to calm Tyler down better than I can.")	1	2	3	4	5	6
4. E	Invite your baby's father to help ("Wouldn't you like to read to Tyler?")	1	2	3	4	5	6
5.	Refuse to do it yourself ("I'm not giving Tyler a bath, it's your turn.")	1	2	3	4	5	6
6.	Give your baby's father a serious look that means, "You need to deal with Tyler now!"	1	2	3	4	5	6
7. E	Let your baby's father know you appreciate his contributions ("It really helps when you take Tyler with you.")	1	2	3	4	5	6
8.	Give your baby's father an irritated or exasperated look	1	2	3	4	5	6
9.	Hint that work needs to be done ("Boy, Tyler sure is dirty!")	1	2	3	4	5	6
10.	Wait until your baby's father does child care tasks on his own	1	2	3	4	5	6
11.	Leave the house so your baby's father doesn't have a choice	1	2	3	4	5	6
12.	Ask your baby's father for help by "talking through" the baby ("Daddy help me, I've got a stinky diaper!")	1	2	3	4	5	6
13. E	Tell your baby's father what a good parent he is	1	2	3	4	5	6
14. E	Ask for your baby's father's opinion ("Do you think Tyler should wear a sweater today?")	1	2	3	4	5	6

15. E	Tell other people about what a good parent he is at a time when he can hear you	1	2	3	4	5	6
16. E	Tell your baby's father how happy he makes your baby ("Tyler really loves to play with you.")	1	2	3	4	5	6
17. E	Encourage your baby's father to spend time alone with your baby	1	2	3	4	5	6
18. E	Arrange activities for your baby's father and child to do together	1	2	3	4	5	6

When your baby's father *does something that* ***YOU*** *don't approve of regarding child care or with your baby, how often do you do the following things?*

	How often do YOU:	Never					Every time
19.	Tell your baby's father the right way to handle the situation ("You need to leave him alone till he calms down.")	1	2	3	4	5	6
20. C	Show your baby's father that you are angry or irritated	1	2	3	4	5	6
21.	Keep quiet, let him handle it anyway	1	2	3	4	5	6
22. C	Tell your baby's father what you think he did wrong ("The bath water is too hot, you'll burn him.")	1	2	3	4	5	6
23.	Explain your concerns to your baby's father ("I'm worried because Tyler might hurt himself if you do that.")	1	2	3	4	5	6
24.	Try to discuss your feelings about what you don't like with your baby's father	1	2	3	4	5	6
25. C	Criticize your baby's father ("Can't you see Tyler doesn't want to do that?")	1	2	3	4	5	6
26.	Ask your baby's father if he would like your help	1	2	3	4	5	6
27. C	Look exasperated and roll your eyes	1	2	3	4	5	6
28.	Tell your baby's father how you have learned to handle similar situations	1	2	3	4	5	6
29. C	Tell other people about the things you don't like ("He puts winter clothes on him and it's 70 degrees out!")	1	2	3	4	5	6

30. C	Take over and do it your own way	1	2	3	4	5	6
31.	Let your baby's father make his own mistakes	1	2	3	4	5	6
32.	Instruct your baby's father ("Tyler likes to be wrapped tight in his blanket.")	1	2	3	4	5	6
33.	Not mention anything, but redo things after your baby's father is gone	1	2	3	4	5	6
34.	Tell your baby's father what he did wrong by "talking through" the baby ("Daddy made your bath too hot, huh?")	1	2	3	4	5	6
35.	Let him do it his own way	1	2	3	4	5	6
36. C	Not mention anything, but redo things after you are gone	1	2	3	4	5	6
37. C	Tell you what you did wrong by "talking through" the baby ("Mommy made your bath too hot, huh?")	1	2	3	4	5	6
38.	Let you do it your own way	1	2	3	4	5	6

Note:
E=Encouragement
C=Criticism